

## THE ROLE OF THE EMPLOYEES IN THE INNOVATION OF THE HOTEL ENTERPRISES

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### Abstract

Due to globalization, gaining competitive advantage has become an important problem for all enterprises. Especially hotel enterprises can face with certain problems such as providing similar and easily imitable products and services. Therefore, they are in the need of employees delivering services in such an innovative way that cannot be imitated easily. First in this study, the factors affecting the innovative behaviors of employees in hotel enterprises were examined in detail. Second, it was explained how employees' innovative behaviors, which would bring a significant competitive advantage to hotel enterprises, could shape consumer perceptions and attitudes. Lastly, the matters to be taken into notice by hotel enterprises were mentioned and it was tried to pave the way for future researches so that hotel enterprises can benefit from their employees' innovative behaviors in a more efficient way.

**Keywords:** Hotel enterprises; Employee innovative behaviors; Innovation; Human capital; Qualified employees.

## O PAPEL DOS COLABORADORES NA INOVAÇÃO DAS EMPRESAS HOTELEIRAS

### Resumo

Devido à globalização, a obtenção de vantagem competitiva tornou-se um problema importante para todas as empresas. Especialmente as empresas hoteleiras podem enfrentar certos problemas, como fornecer produtos e serviços semelhantes e facilmente imitáveis. Portanto, eles estão precisando de funcionários que prestem serviços de uma maneira inovadora que não possa ser facilmente imitada. Primeiramente neste capítulo, os fatores que afetam os comportamentos inovadores dos empregados em empreendimentos hoteleiros foram examinados em detalhe. Em segundo lugar, foi explicado como os comportamentos inovadores dos funcionários, que trariam uma vantagem competitiva significativa às empresas hoteleiras, poderiam moldar as percepções e atitudes do consumidor. Por último, foram mencionados os assuntos a serem tomados em consideração pelas empresas hoteleiras e tentou-se preparar o caminho para futuras pesquisas, para que as empresas hoteleiras possam beneficiar de comportamentos inovadores dos seus empregados de uma forma mais eficiente.

**Palavras-chave:** Empresas hoteleiras; Comportamentos inovadores dos funcionários; Inovação; Capital humano; Funcionários qualificados.

## EL PAPEL DE LOS EMPLEADOS EN LA INNOVACIÓN DE LAS EMPRESAS HOTELERAS

### Resumen

Debido a la globalización, obtener una ventaja competitiva se ha convertido en un problema importante para todas las empresas. Especialmente las empresas hoteleras pueden enfrentar ciertos problemas, como el suministro de productos y servicios similares y fácilmente imitables. Por lo tanto, tienen la necesidad de que los empleados presten servicios de una forma tan innovadora que no se pueda imitar fácilmente. Primero en este estudio, se examinaron en detalle los factores que afectan los comportamientos innovadores de los empleados en empresas hoteleras. En segundo lugar, se explicó cómo los comportamientos innovadores de los empleados, que traerían una ventaja competitiva significativa a las empresas hoteleras, podrían moldear las percepciones y actitudes de los consumidores. Por último, se mencionaron los aspectos que deben tomar en cuenta las empresas hoteleras y se intentó allanar el camino para futuras investigaciones para que las empresas hoteleras puedan beneficiarse de los comportamientos innovadores de sus empleados de una manera más eficiente.

**Palabras clave:** Empresas hoteleras; Comportamientos innovadores de los empleados; Innovación; Capital humano; Empleados calificados.



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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Competition in global market leads enterprises taking steps to gain competitive advantage (Güneren Özdemir & Yılmaz, 2016; Miron, Erez, & Naveh, 2004). The steps taken for gaining a competitive advantage today will be the usual practices of future.

Therefore, enterprises desiring to be pioneers in the sector or to keep this position should develop strategies focusing on innovative activities for product and service development and production processes (Nijhof, Krabbendam, & Looise, 2002). At this point, enterprises should care about their employees (Serrano & Pucha, 2017).

As a matter of fact, employees get information from customers by getting interaction with them. This information could be used for developing innovative product and services (Ottenbacher & Gnoth, 2005). At this point, it is necessary to focus on the terms which would ensure the interaction of employees with consumers in a comfortable way and would motivate them in this direction. Besides, employees could shape consumers' quality perceptions through the services they deliver (Heskett, Jones, Loveman, Sasser, & Schlesinger, 2008; Ng, David, & Dagger, 2011).

Consumers' service quality perceptions affect their novelty value perceptions (Dedeoğlu, Bilgihan, Ye, Buonincontri, & Okumus, 2018). In the light of this finding, examination of the factors that could direct and boost the service quality perceptions of consumers will provide fruitful findings to the enterprises which have adopted this innovative development approach.

Especially because tourism is a labor-intense sector, it can be indicated that the role of service quality in this sector is at more forefront. In fact, it is often emphasized in the studies that quality perceptions regarding the employees in tourism enterprises, particularly in hotels, direct value perceptions of tourists in a positive way (Chen & Hu, 2010). For instance, Chen and Chen (2010) found that positive quality perceptions of destination experience increase value perceptions, and Woo Gon Kim, Jin-Sun and Hyun Jeong Kim, (2008) observed that tourists' perceptions of service quality in hotel enterprises affected their value perceptions in a positive way.

At this point, it is necessary to focus on innovative value perceptions of tourists. The cost of product and services developed or produced as a result of innovative activities of hotel enterprises could be determined in a clearer way with the help of consumers' novelty value perceptions regarding those products and services.

In addition, product and services to be perceived new by tourists will provide enterprises with economic and competitive advantage. In tourism sector, physical

elements have a significant impact on novelty perceptions of tourists. For instance, renovating the decorations or adapting to technological advancements within the scope of innovative steps could lead tourists to have high novelty value perceptions regarding the enterprises in question. However, these kinds of physical innovative initiatives are easily imitable. Therefore, physical innovative investments could result in short-term competitive advantage.

On the other hand, personnel delivering services in tourism enterprises play a very significant role in terms of competitive advantage. Moreover, innovative investments on the staff working in tourism enterprises cannot be easily imitated, hence, they can bring along long-term competitive advantage (Ottenbacher, Gnoth, & Jones, 2006). For this reason, nuances the staff would use during the service-delivery process are unique, therefore, they cannot be imitated easily, and the gained competitive advantage will be utilized for a longer period of time.

The advantages provided by employees are not only limited to increasing the quality of service delivery processes. With the help of gathering feedbacks from tourists, employees could make remarkable contributions to new service development processes of the enterprise. More clearly each and every one of employees in hotel enterprises plays a critical role in new product development process (Ottenbacher, 2007).

Hotel enterprises are the places where consumers (tourists) enjoy food and services all day long. Therefore, consumers get in interaction with employees and the feedbacks employees could get from the consumers could provide very beneficial information on generating innovative ideas. This point was emphasized in the study of Hon, Chan, and Lu, (2013).

Considering the importance of the information to be collected from employees on new product development processes and its role in the implementation of innovative activities, tourists' interaction with employees becomes more important and beneficial in tourism sector compared to other sectors.

The factors that affect employees' innovativeness are important for businesses. There are certain formal rules that employees in hotel enterprises need to follow. However, as mentioned before, hotel enterprises are the places where the interaction between employees and consumers is intense. In order to be able to solve the problems faced in such places in an efficient, a practical and satisfactory way, sometimes it requires that employees come up with innovative solution options.

In this regard, a management style providing employees with opportunities where they could create flexible solutions could be required. For instance, a management style providing a barman with the flexibility to prepare a drink not included in the menu but

requested by a customer, or, providing a housekeeper with the flexibility to provide a service which is not delivered by housekeeping services under normal circumstances upon the request by a customer is essential in order to allow employees to create innovative solutions where necessary.

In this regard firstly, the importance of innovation and employees was emphasized in this study. Second, it was explained how innovative behaviors that will contribute to high quality and qualified service delivery do arise. In addition, it was discussed how employees' innovative behaviors would affect consumers' evaluations, perceptions and attitudes. Lastly, the contribution of employees' innovative behaviors' to hotel enterprises was emphasized and specific recommendations were provided to academicians and practitioners regarding the steps to be taken in order to gain strategic competitive advantage with the help of their employees' innovative behaviors.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Innovation and its strategic importance for hospitality industry

Van de Ven, (1986, p. 590) defines innovation as "the development and implementation of new ideas by people who over time engage in transactions with others within an institutional order". In literature there is a bulk of information on the types of innovation.

Technical innovation, administrative innovations, service innovations, product innovations, management innovation are only few of these types. Despite the variety of innovation types, there are two types commonly accepted in literature regarding how innovation is generated.

First one is incremental innovation and the other one is radical innovation. While incremental innovation refers "to generate innovations that refine and reinforce existing products and services", radical innovations refers "to generate innovations that significantly transform existing products and services" (Subramaniam & Youndt, 2005, p. 452). Subramaniam and Youndt (2005) in their empirical study found that different dimensions of organizational intellectual capital (organizational, human, and social capital) and their interrelationships have different effects on incremental and radical innovative capability.

Innovation is one of the main factors affecting the competitiveness of nations and enterprises (Galia & Legros, 2004). Strategic importance of innovation has often been examined since 1940s. Regardless of type of innovation or sector, it is one of the most important tools for enterprises in terms of increasing the capacity, improving the quality of products and services,

reinforcing the organizational prestige, ensuring customer loyalty, financial savings and increasing organizational performance, which will result in increasing the competitiveness of enterprises (Ottenbacher, 2007; Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2007; Ottenbacher, Shaw, & Lockwood, 2006; Salem, 2014; Schumpeter, 2010).

In tourism and hospitality industry, the most significant benefit of innovation is the reinforced competitive structure (Ottenbacher & Gnoth, 2005). Nevertheless, it is not certain whether the innovative ideas, products or services would last long despite the huge importance of innovation. What is more important is to be able to translate innovative ideas into products or services. In other words, innovative activities might cause time, labor and financial losses. Therefore, this situation could bring risky and costly structure. As a result, failure in innovation could damage the enterprise's prestige (Ottenbacher, 2007).

Despite this risk, enterprises giving particular importance to innovation and innovative ideas can adapt to changing environmental conditions more easily and yield a higher performance thanks to new competencies of their employees (Lloréns Montes, Ruiz Moreno, & Miguel Molina Fernández, 2004). As a matter of fact, Sandvik, Duhan, and Sandvik, (2014) showed a positive relationship between innovativeness and profitability in the Norwegian hotel industry.

### 2.2 The need for qualified employees in hospitality industry

High turnover rate and lack of qualified employees are among the factors that the enterprises operating in hospitality sector complain most nearly all around the world. Particularly high turnover rate results in low motivation, decrease in service quality and undergo new costs related to finding new employees and their orientation trainings. This situation also affects enterprise profitability in a negative way (Hinkin & Tracey, 2000; Simons & Hinkin, 2001).

In the event that individuals having left the enterprise are the qualified employees, it causes a more remarkable cost to the enterprise. In addition, negative impact of turnover rate is more visible in large-scale hotels because the working processes are more complicated and difficult to cope with in these hotels (Simons & Hinkin, 2001).

Nowadays many hospitality firms (including small and large ones) try to attract and keep qualified employees in their organization by implementing practices they value. Empirical studies carried out so far showed that employees' turnover rates are affected by not only monetary and other job opportunities (Wasmuth & Davis, 1983) but also other factors such

as social responsibility (Çalışkan & Ünüsan, 2011) and ethical leadership (Kim & Brymer, 2011).

In addition, many studies found evidence for positive relationship between corporate social responsibility performance and employer attractiveness and job pursuit intentions. That means the more hospitality firms implement social and environmental responsibility practices, the more they attract qualified employees in their organization (Behrend, Baker, & Thompson, 2009; Gully, Phillips, Castellano, Han, & Kim, 2013; Murray & Ayoun, 2010; Turban & Greening, 1997).

Besides, Boğan & Dedeoğlu (2017a) showed that qualified employees' perceptions of hotels' social responsibility activities directed at customers and employees positively affect their commitment to tourism industry and willingness to recommend their organization as good place to work. That means hospitality firms can benefit from social responsibility practices to "win the talent war" (Bhattacharya, Korschun, & Sen, 2009, p. 37). These results revealed strategic role of social responsibility activities for hospitality firms.

### **2.3 The role of qualified employees in innovation process**

One of the most efficient ways of maintaining business survival and gaining competitive advantage is related to the resources and competencies the enterprises do have (Ülgen & Mirze, 2010). In the event that the competencies are unique, difficult to imitate and hardly replaceable, they become as scarce as hen's teeth (Barney, 1991). Benefitting from the competencies and capabilities of employees in order to reach the planned objectives is related to wise management of human resources (de Mello, Pimentel, da Silva, & Pimentel, 2013; Nieves & Quintana, 2018).

Employing individuals who are lack of knowledge and competency required by the job could bring some problems regarding the service quality. At this point, the process should be initiated with an effective selection procedure (Wilson, Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2012).

Personal skills are as important as financial skills for hospitality operations (Tanke, 2001). Especially employees working in service industry are critically important for the success of the enterprise. Furthermore, according to the resource-based view (Barney, 1991), employees who dedicated themselves to job and to reach the organizational objectives are hardly imitable by other competitors, and therefore, serve as a very important competitive factor for enterprises.

Since employees are in direct interaction with customers, they are an important part of customer satisfaction and loyalty. Customers generally build their firm-related opinions on how the employees provide service (John & Storey, 1998). In addition, employees

working in hospitality industry play an important role for attracting other qualified potential employees to the enterprise based on their positive experiences in the workplace. Upon hearing criticisms about the enterprise, they work for, they personalize those criticisms and try to advocate the enterprise.

Galia and Legros (2004) found that one of the main problems the enterprises face while discovering and realizing innovative ideas is the lack of qualified employees. Employees with high level of knowledge, competency and ability contribute to innovation in the enterprise because they know how and where to use these positive resources, to create new ways of thinking and to learn and adapt to changes very easily (Nieves & Segarra-Ciprés, 2015; Subramaniam & Youndt, 2005). Based on the fact that knowledge and capabilities of employees are regarded as human capital, enterprises should maintain and reinforce the human capital they have in order to encourage the development and realization of innovative ideas (Chen & Huang, 2009).

In hospitality industry, successful innovation is not only related to product and services but also how the product/service quality is perceived by customers (de Brentani, 1991). Furthermore, the eagerness and knowledge and capabilities of employees who are in direct relationship with customers bear a remarkable importance because employees directly influence the customers' quality perceptions (Brown & Lam, 2008; Ottenbacher, Gnoth, et al., 2006).

The success of innovation in hospitality industry becomes possible as a result of employees' communicating their ideas and providing necessary support to realize these ideas. At this point, enterprises should encourage and motivate their employees to develop innovative ideas and take innovative initiatives with the help of strategic human resources practices (Chen & Huang, 2009).

Because of intangible nature of services, simultaneity of production and consumption, and the role of human factors in service delivery, the success of innovation process in hospitality industry mostly depends on attitudes and behaviors of employees and firms' human capital (Chang, Gong, & Shum, 2011; Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2007). In today's market environment, employee innovative behaviors are of vital importance for the success of enterprises. Employees provide unique service to customers through bringing better or newer ideas into forefront, which contributes to increasing the organizational performance (Sandvik et al., 2014).

Therefore, it is very critical to involve employees in innovation processes. Since employees are always in interaction with customers they have the opportunity to understand wishes and expectations of customers more easily and to develop the service quality

accordingly. Adopting the idea developed during innovation process and its final success will be accelerated with the involvement of customers into the process (Ottenbacher, 2007).

Furthermore, the product produced in hospitality industry is mainly service, employees' behaviors and attitudes materialize the service for the evaluation of customers (John & Storey, 1998). At this point, determining the factors motivating employees to create innovative ideas would facilitate management's work. Creating an innovative organizational climate is maybe the most important one among these factors (Davidson, 2003).

In addition, Wang, Tang, and Cheng, (2018) showed that ethical and sustainable practices of corporate citizenship have positive effects on organizational innovation which results in positive business performance. That means hospitality establishments that have more focus on corporate social responsibility initiatives are more likely to have innovative feedbacks regarding products, processes and services from frontline employees in particular, thus leading to greater customer satisfaction and sustainable competitive advantages.

There is no definitive judgment indicating that qualified employees would contribute to innovation process by developing new ideas and new ways of thinking. This is not about whether qualified employees develop or are not able to develop new ideas or new ways of thinking.

In fact, it is related to the fact that qualified employees might have some insecurities or do not feel loyalty or commitment to the organization. Trust is the cornerstone in all relationships. Especially if the employees have the impression that their ideas would be denigrated and depreciated, they are very likely to stay quiet and even discourage other employees to express their ideas.

Therefore, it is of vital importance for organizations to gain the trust of employees. It would become much more important for the new service development process because the products in service industry have a non-physical nature and cannot be tried in advance. At this point enterprises should further focus on practices or activities to win the trust of employees.

## 2.4 Factors affecting employees' innovativeness

In their study, Ottenbacher, Shaw, et al., (2006) revealed that strategic human resources management practices, personnel support, personnel training and employee commitment are important within the scope of factors affecting the success of innovative services developed by enterprises operating in hospitality industry.

Specifically, managers should involve their employees into complicated management process of the hotel in the context of strategic human resource management. In this way, employees will be able to get directly involved in decision-making processes that will directly influence their work, they will mention the points ignored or not known by decision-makers, and thus, will bring a different perspective to innovation process.

Management should create such an environment where employees could demonstrate their capabilities, have more working motivation and face with specific situations where they need to take decisions on their own (Ottenbacher, 2007). With the help of those practices, enterprises could easily discover and benefit from the knowledge and competencies of employees. They can also make use of the creative ideas and innovative approaches of employees for the purpose of producing new product and services or developing the existing management processes (Scarborough, 2003).

Chen and Huang (2009) found that knowledge management capacity plays a mediator role in the effect of strategic human resource practices' on enterprises' innovation performances. In other words, strategic human resource practices is positively related to knowledge management capacity, which has a positive impact on the enterprise's innovation performance. At this point, managers should reinforce their human capital through strategic HR practices. In this way, employees would contribute to strengthening the enterprise's innovation performance via knowledge acquisition, sharing and practicing.

In another study, Subramaniam and Youndt (2005) found that only human capital has negative effect on radical innovative capability. However, when human capital interact with social capital, their interactions have positive effect on radical innovative capability. That means, "unless individual knowledge is networked, shared and channeled through relationships, it provides little benefit to organization in terms of innovative capabilities" (p. 459).

Another important step to take to be successful at innovation process is the personnel empowerment. Empowerment refers "the process of giving employees throughout an organization the authority to make important decisions and to be responsible for their outcomes" (Jones, Comfort, & Hillier, 2004, p. 154).

In case of any problem or challenging situations, employees are supposed to make their own decision or use their discretionary power, which will encourage employees to have self-esteem and have the capability of taking certain responsibilities, to increase their motivation and to discover their own potential (Klagge, 1998).

On the other hand, when they are given little responsibility or authority in the work they perform, they intend to leave the organization (Hinkin & Tracey, 2000).

Another important factor is the training of employees. Enterprises could contribute to the success of innovation process through training their employees especially on interpersonal relationships which is considered as the competency the majority of employees are lack of.

Following up continuous training programs on different subjects will help employees enhance their knowledge and capabilities, widen their perspectives and become equipped with innovative skills and ideas. Thus, employees would contribute to increasing the performance as a result of reflecting their experiences, knowledge and competencies acquired during the training process (Chen & Huang, 2009; Ottenbacher, Shaw, et al., 2006).

Management innovation aiming at increasing the productivity of an enterprise's internal management process has recently become popular in tourism literature, as well. Nieves and Segarra-Ciprés (2015) point out that human capital and integrating capability positively influence management innovation in the context of hotel establishments in Spain. Human capital refers to "the set of abilities, knowledge and skills of employees in an enterprise" (Lado & Wilson, 1994, p. 705).

Besides, they found a positive relationship between managers' social relations with external change agents (consultants and academic researchers) and management innovation. This means that qualified employees with high knowledge, abilities and skills play an important role in management innovations, which contribute to improving organizational efficacy. Hotel establishments' ability to combine individual knowledge contributes to introduction of new management practices.

Chang et al. (2011) revealed the positive effect of human resource management (HRM) practices on incremental and radical innovation in hospitality firms. While radical innovations require fundamental changes, incremental innovations are minor improvements or simple adjustment (Dewar & Dutton, 1986).

Specifically, Chang et al. (2011) found that hiring core customer-contact employees with multiple skills and training them for multiple skills as HRM practices enhanced both incremental and radical innovation in hospitality establishments. Beside they found that among these HRM practices, hiring for skill might be even more important than training for skill for both incremental and radical innovations (p. 816).

In another study, Park, Lee and Kim, (2018) showed the positive effect of employees' work engagement on their innovative behavior in travel industry. In the study, researchers indicated positive contribution of social responsibility directed at employees and customers on employees' work engagement. Their results show parallelism with the findings of Kulie et al. (2011).

## 2.5 Outputs of employee innovative behaviors

Innovative behaviors of employees in hotels, as indicated and explained above, were mainly examined within the scope of their antecedents. However, these behaviors are an important determinative factor with regard to the product and service-related assessments and future attitudes of tourists visiting the hotel (LI; HSU, 2016). A

s a matter of fact, hotels are an important part of labor-intense service industry. In labor-intense enterprises, employee behaviors play a critical role influential on consumers' positive attitudes (Dedeoglu, Bilgihan, Ye, Buonincontri, & Okumus, 2018; Gosling, Queiroz, Meints, & Christino, 2017; Küçükergin & Dedeoğlu, 2014). In addition, as emphasized by Stamper and Dyne (2001) and Baradarani and Kilic (2018), close interaction of employees' with customers during service-delivery processes help employees to create more innovative ideas, which could directly affect employees' innovative behaviors, and thus, quality and satisfaction perceptions of consumers.

Maria Stock, Jong, and Zacharias (2017) found that innovative service behaviors of front-office personnel act as an important determinative for consumers' satisfaction levels. In fact, this model mentioned by Authors and examined in their study is the elaborated version of conventional service-profit chain. In the Conventional Service-Profit Chain, it is highlighted that employees' behaviors and satisfaction levels are important in terms of consumers' satisfaction and loyalty levels (Heskett et al., 2008). Nevertheless, Maria Stock et al. (2017) examined the effect to be created by employees shown on the conventional service-profit chain model within the scope of "innovative service behavior" and suggested a new model focusing on more detailed and sensitive points.

Latest industrial developments bring along many changes in tourism sector especially for hotel enterprises. For instance, Marriott use humanoid service robots for housekeeping services (Silva & DeSocio, 2016) and Nestle utilize from thousands of humanoid robots on shop floor in order to sell Nescafé (Nestlé, 2016).

Considering these developments, Stock and Merkle (2018) examined the effect of innovative behaviors demonstrated by humanoid service robots and human service employees on consumers' satisfaction and delight reactions. Despite the fact that innovative behaviors of humanoid service robots are influential on and important for consumers' positive evaluations, it was realized that innovative behavior shown by human service employees is a more effective factor.

Victorino, Verma, Plaschka, & Dev, (2005) researched the service innovation's impact on consumers' preferences in hotel facilities. As understood

from the research findings, service innovation's effect becomes more visible in the preference of economy hotels. In addition, Victorino et al. (2005) indicated that such innovative service amenities as technological improvements and customization features are more effective on the preferences of individuals travelling for leisure rather than for business. In this regard, it should be emphasized that innovation practices in hotels should differ in line with the visiting purposes of tourists.

Innovative approaches in hotels could be determinative for organizations' marketing performances, as well. In their study, Tajeddini and Trueman (2012) found that management's innovativeness behaviors positively affect the financial and marketing performance of the organization. Researchers examined such attitudes as customer retention, quality perceptions and customer satisfaction acquired by customers following their experience with product and services.

Managers' adopting innovative approaches and encouraging their employees in this matter would help employees show innovative behaviors. In this regard, as emphasized before, innovative approaches of employees in hotels could promote positive attitudes in tourists. As a matter of fact, Ottenbacher (2007) indicated that successful innovation practices are customer driven and are important for positive feedbacks from consumers.

Another important matter for consumers is the value obtained from the product they used (Barboza Núñez, 2017). Especially novelty value examined within the scope of hedonic value is closely related to innovative behavior. On the condition that a consumer considers he obtains innovative benefits from the product and services they enjoyed, they can feel satisfied about the product and service in question (Lee, Chen, Chen, & Chen, 2010; Park, Snell, Ha, & Chung, 2011).

It is the same case for hotel enterprises, as well. As a matter of fact, it is highlighted that tourists' novelty perceptions regarding the products and services in hotels are an important determinative factor for satisfaction and loyalty (Dedeoğlu, Küçükergin, & Balıkçioğlu, 2015; Williams & Soutar, 2009).

Therefore, the same relationship is expected to be observed in hotel enterprises, as well. At this point, it can be stated that employees in hotels bear huge duties and responsibilities on their shoulders. If employees could provide novelty ideas in terms of meeting customers' product and service-related expectations, tourists could consider that the products and services have an innovative nature. As a result, tourists' satisfaction and loyalty attitudes could be affected positively.

Considering the mentioned explanations, it can be indicated that employees' innovative behaviors do affect consumers' quality perceptions, value perceptions, especially novelty value perceptions and finally their satisfaction and loyalty levels. Besides increasing their overall income levels, these positive outcomes would help hotel enterprises to win strategic competitive advantage.

### **3 FORMATION PROCESSES AND IMPORTANCE OF INNOVATIVE BEHAVIOR OF EMPLOYEES' IN THE CONTEXT OF HOTEL ENTERPRISES**

Winning a competitive advantage comes to forefront among the most critical problems faced by enterprises nowadays (de Oliveira, dos Santos Filho, Araujo, Bertert, & da Silva, 2018; Przybyszewski, Fernandes, & Magalhaes Niada, 2017). In order to gain competitive advantage, enterprises are in the search of innovation. Specially consumers' satisfaction and loyalty levels are of critical in terms of enterprises' competitive advantage.

Therefore, administrative bodies in hotel enterprises should win the advantage by fulfilling the mentioned steps. At this point, they should first attract the attention of consumers and create positive outputs in their minds. With this purpose, they should be able to provide better products and services compared to their rivals. In this regard, it would be a wise step to focus on consumers' perceptions.

As a matter of fact, what determines whether products and services are satisfactorily delivered is the evaluations of consumers. Evaluations create consumers' perceptions. Besides being subjective, consumers' perceptions reflect the reality regarding the performance of product and services (Alvensleben & Meier, 1990; DeYoung & Crane, 1992). Therefore, consumers' perceptions of hotel enterprises should be understood.

At this point, it would be beneficial to focus on image or branding activities. As a matter of fact, image and brand perceptions are among the main drivers bringing competitive advantage to an enterprise over its rivals (Aydın, 2016; Fombrun, 1995). Strong image perception or prestigious image perception could act as a main factor affecting the individuals' product preferences (Durna, Dedeoğlu, & Balıkçioğlu, 2015). Thanks to its image, consumers could put the hotel into a separate and more special position than other hotels.

Consumers' perceptions of hotel enterprises could arise in two ways: creating an image in the mind of potential consumer by making an impression with the help of several tools. This image perception could arise in an organic or induced way (Gartner, 1994). The second one is the general image perception arising as a result of experiences (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991;

Gunn, 1972). Both image types would affect consumers' purchasing processes and provide the hotel enterprise with a significant competitive advantage.

Consumers' quality perceptions of product and services play a critical role in the formation of their general image perceptions regarding the hotel enterprises. If they would perceive that the product and services provided by the hotel have high quality, their general impressions on the main components of the hotel would become positive (Dedeoğlu, Balıkçioğlu, & Küçükergin, 2016; Dedeoğlu et al., 2015), which would result in positive general image perceptions regarding the hotel.

In addition, consumers' value perceptions could affect general image perceptions in a positive way (Hu, Kandampully, & Juwaheer, 2009). When consumers compare the financial and non-financial costs they tolerated during their holidays and the benefits they got afterwards, their value perceptions regarding the hotel would increase if the benefit they got weights more than the costs they born. In other words, if consumers would consider the product and services provided by the hotel beneficial from a functional and hedonic perspective, they would both have positive image perceptions and positive attitudes regarding their possible visits in the future.

At this point it should be indicated that two most critical factors to be taken into consideration by hotel enterprises are employees and innovation. As the explanation of the first one, hotel enterprises put remarkable efforts to make their visitors to feel satisfied both by the physical environment and the employees in the hotel. In addition, there are many studies highlighting the importance of physical environments of hotel enterprises and that they provide competitive advantage to the enterprise (Choi & Kandampully, 2018; Dedeoğlu et al., 2018; Pizam & Tasci, 2018; Wang et al., 2018).

Furthermore, keeping the physical components up-to-date and renovating and renewing those within the scope of innovation could significantly contribute to competitive advantage (Stranegård & Stranegård, 2012). Nevertheless, physical elements in a hotel enterprise can easily be imitated despite their high costs. This might create vulnerability with regard to maintaining competitive advantage in long term.

On the other hand, employees could play a critical role in helping enterprises maintain its competitive advantage with the help of their personal capabilities and skills because employees cannot be copied or imitated. This highlights the fact that employees in hotel enterprises should be taken into further consideration.

The second component, innovation makes remarkable contributions to gain permanent competitive advantage (Porter, 1990). In fact, it can be indicated that innovation activities are mainly carried out to gain competitive advantage. Consumers' desires and

demands change continuously and innovative activities have the power of influencing consumers' purchasing behaviors before and after their demands and desires arise.

More clearly, an innovative activity is organized in order to satisfy the expectations of consumers, and also, it brings an important competitive advantage in terms of the innovative products and services which are not among the demands or desires of consumers; however, become a need following their production. In this regard, it can be indicated that hotel enterprises should combine these two critical elements in order to ensure the sustainability of competitive advantage. In other words, hotel enterprises should take steps to encourage their employees to demonstrate innovative behaviors.

As a matter of fact, innovative behaviors of employees' are very closely related to above-mentioned components such as service quality, perceived value, satisfaction, image and loyalty. Consumers' high innovation perception of product and services could lead them to consider the product high quality (Cho & Pucik, 2005). Specially consumers in hotel enterprises expect from employees to provide innovative solutions to problems.

In addition, if consumers' novelty perceptions increase as a result of interaction with employees, it will help them feel satisfied with product and services and have positive perceptions of organizational image. Consumers' innovation perception will bring along positive organizational image and make them volunteer fans. In this way, these fans will defend and promote the organization in every platform for free and in a sincere way.

Nevertheless, relevant strategies and management philosophy should be developed in order to encourage employees to show innovative behavior. Despite the fact that the factors influencing employees' willingness to communicate innovative ideas and approach could differ from one individual to another, it has been observed that employees give notable importance to ethics, social responsibility and environmental initiatives, which was supported in many recent empirical studies.

Specially the fact that the Millennials have such a presumption that they should be sensitive about the social and environmental concerns as well as the economic concerns regarding their workplaces should be taken into notice particularly by the enterprises aiming at gaining competitive advantage through attracting the qualified employees to their enterprise.

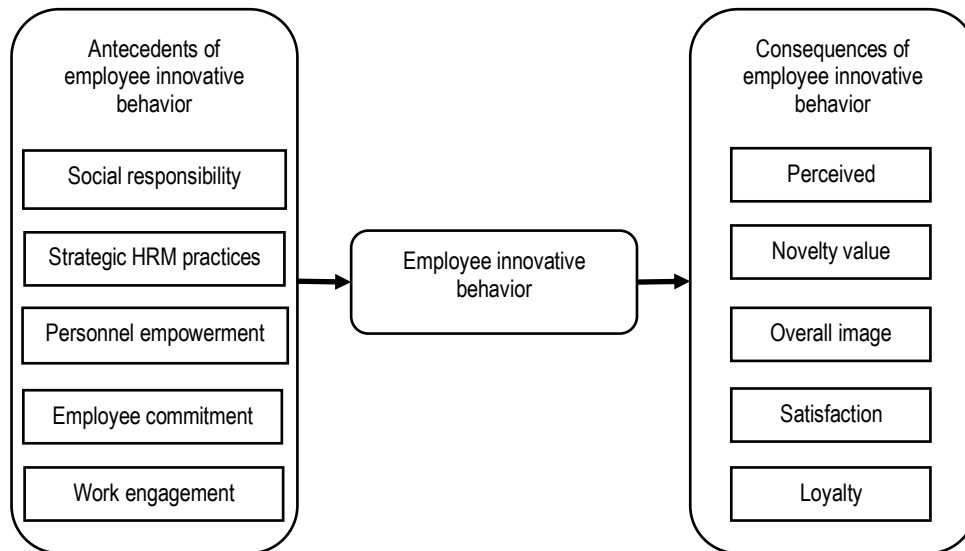
At this point, enterprises should make sincere initiatives to find solutions for social and environmental problems in the region and communicate these initiatives to their employees through various communication



channels. In this way it will become much easier to obtain the desired outcomes. Besides ethical, social and environmental initiatives, strategic human resource management practices as hiring core customer-contact employees with multiple skills and training them for

multiple skills may increase innovation success rate of hospitality establishments. Personnel empowerment, increasing employees commitment, employees' work engagement are critical antecedents of employee innovative behaviors in hospitality firms.

**Figure 1 - Conceptual Model.**



Source: proper elaboration.

#### 4 SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For hotel enterprises competitive gets more important every single day. In such an environment with intense competition, hotel enterprises have to introduce basic capabilities to their organizations to gain competitive advantage. Adoption of innovative perspective lead the list of basic capabilities required for competitive advantage. Embracement of an innovative perspective by managers and sustaining it in harmony with organizational culture would bring continuous competitive advantage to the organization.

Specially taking into notice that the main purpose of an enterprise is to maintain its existence, consumers' wishes, needs and possible demands should be taken as a priority. In the event that consumers' wishes, needs and possible demands could be estimated accurately, it would become more likely for consumers to have positive outputs about the organization. Those positive outputs lay down the foundation critical for gaining the competitive advantage.

In this regard, employees' innovative behaviors were examined in this study within the scope of competitive advantage. First, managerial factors to encourage employees to show innovative behaviors were analyzed in detail. Later, how consumers' innovative behaviors influence their product and service perceptions and attitudes towards the hotel enterprises.

It is obvious that hotel enterprises play a critical role in motivating employees to show innovative behaviors. Such factors as corporate social and environmental practices, leadership, perceived organizational support, trust, organizational climate and culture encourage innovative behavior. Therefore, innovation should be adopted and supported by management bodies to be able to lead employees showing successful innovative behaviors and motivate them to become more qualified employees.

On the other hand, another point that should not be ignored is that employees might have negative approach towards the philosophy of innovation. Due to certain reasons (difficulty in accepting the innovation, considering innovation as an extra workload, the sense of inertia) some employees could resist to innovative approaches.

For this reason, those employees should be specified and their resistance should be minimized and eliminated. Later, they should be encouraged to show innovative behaviors with the help of certain motives. This type of employees generally increases their resistance considering possible negative outcomes and failures of showing a new behavior. Therefore, it would be safe and sound for managers to take it into notice before taking the steps to encourage innovative behavior.

Thanks to the innovative approach supported in the managerial scope and incorporated into organizational

culture, enterprises would be successful at motivating their employees' innovative behaviors. In this way, consumers will have positive perceptions and attitudes towards the enterprise.

Those positive perceptions and attitudes have critical importance for enterprises aiming at gaining competitive advantage (Kandampully, Zhang, & Jaakkola, 2018; Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Soudagar, Iyer, & Hildebrand, 2012). Individuals with positive organizational perceptions and attitudes are very likely to become loyal consumers (Lee & Kim, 2018; Rajaguru & Hassanli, 2018; Xie & Chen, 2014; Yolal, Chi, & Pesämaa, 2017). Advantages of loyalty will bring remarkable easiness to the enterprise in terms of gaining competitive advantage.

However, it should not be ignored that some consumers might have traditional approach. They tend to prefer the product and services that they are familiar with and do not like risk and uncertainty. Therefore, uncertainty to raise due to innovative behaviors might not be welcomed by this kind of consumer group. Besides cultural effects of the society they live in, personal characteristics could lead those individuals to show the above-mentioned behaviors.

At this point, hotel enterprises can get information about the cultural characteristics of their target market with the help of conducting some examinations in cultural context and ask from their employees to show or not to show innovative behaviors. Therefore, hotel enterprises should support their employees for their innovative behaviors; however, target market should still be taken into notice.

## 5 FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Innovation and innovative behavior are among the frequently examined topics. Nevertheless, it can be indicated many antecedent variables that could help encouraging innovative behaviors have not yet been examined. For instance, such structures as behavioral integrity (Boğan & Dedeoğlu, 2017b; Simons, 2002) and corporate hypocrisy-sincerity (Wagner, Lutz, & Weitz, 2009) affect the perceptions of employees, and thus, they could increase their self-confidence and encourage them to behave in a more flexible manner.

Those flexible behaviors could help individuals to show innovative behaviors. However, the mentioned antecedents should be supported with empirical studies. In addition, the number of studies examining how employees' innovative behaviors influence consumers' perceptions especially in hotel enterprises is quite limited. It should not be ignored that product and service perceptions in a country have an impact on country image, as well (Dedeoğlu, 2018, 2019; Nagashima, 1970; Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2007).

In this regard, it should be examined in more detail how employees' innovative behaviors would influence different consumer perceptions and attitudes, e.g. perceptions of country of origin image.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

Positive feedbacks from consumers play a crucial role in gaining competitive advantage. Employees' behaviors are too important to ignore in terms of ensuring consumers' organizational perceptions, evaluations, impressions and attitudes. Particularly in globalizing world and intense competitive environment, organizations should pay attention to their employees and their motivation of showing innovative behaviors.

As a matter of fact, employee innovative behaviors are very closely related with the fact that employees are qualified staff. A qualified staff always creates positive perceptions in the eye of consumers. At this point, adopting a management philosophy allowing employees to show innovative behaviors is one of the most fundamental and critical steps to be taken by hotel enterprises.

In this study the factors that could affect employees' possibility to show and not to show innovative behaviors were discussed in detail. Later, the possibility that employees' innovative behavior could affect their service quality perceptions, value perceptions, image perceptions, satisfaction and loyalty levels was explained. In this way, detailed information on employee innovative behaviors was provided to sector representatives and academicians.

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